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SERMONS

BY

The late Rev. Mr. STERNE.

VOL. V.

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SERMON I.

Temporal Advantages of Religion.

SERMON I.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

THERE are two opinions which the inconsiderate are apt to take upon trust.—The first is—a vicious life, is a life of liberty, pleasure, and happy advantages.—The second is—and which is the converse of the first—that a religious life is a servile and most uncomfortable state.

The first breach which the devil made upon human innocence, was by

the help of the firſt of theſe ſuggeſtions, when he told Eve, that by eating of the tree of knowledge, ſhe ſhould be as God, that is, ſhe ſhould reap ſome high and ſtrange felicity from doing what was forbidden her.—But I need not repeat the ſucceſs—Eve learnt the difference between good and evil by her tranſgreſſion, which ſhe knew not before—but then ſhe fatally learnt at the ſame time, that the difference was only this—that good is that which can only give the mind pleaſure and comfort—and that evil is that, which muſt neceſſarily be attended ſooner or later with ſhame and ſorrow.

As the deceiver of mankind thus began his triumph over our race—ſo

has he carried it on ever since by the very same argument of deluſion.—That is, by poſſeſſing men's minds early with great expectations of the preſent incomes of ſin;—making them dream of wondrous gratifications they are to feel in following their appetites in a forbidden way—making them fancy, that their own grapes yield not ſo delicious a taſte as their neighbours, and that they ſhall quench their thirſt with more pleaſure at his fountain, than at their own. This is the opinion which at firſt too generally prevails—till experience and proper ſeaſons of reflection make us all at one time or other confeſs—that our counſellor has been (as from the beginning) an impoſ-

ture—and that inſtead of fulfilling theſe hopes of gain and ſweetneſs in what is forbidden—that on the contrary, every unlawful enjoyment leads only to bitterneſs and loſs.

The ſecond opinion, or, That a religious life is a ſervile and uncomfortable ſtate, has proved a no leſs fatal and capital falſe principle in the conduct of unexperience through life—the foundation of which miſtake ariſing chiefly from this previous wrong judgment—that true happineſs and freedom lies in a man's always following his own humour—that to live by moderate and preſcrib'd rules, is to live without joy—that not to proſecute our paſſions is to be cowards—

and

and to forego every thing for the tedious diſtance of a future life.

Was it true that a virtuous man could have no pleaſure but what ſhould ariſe from that remote proſpect—I own we are by nature ſo goaded on by the deſire of preſent happineſs, that was that the caſe, thouſands wou'd faint under the diſcouragement of ſo remote an expectation.—But in the mean time the Scriptures give us a very different proſpect of this matter.—There we are told that the ſervice of God is true liberty—that the yoke of Chriſtianity is eaſy in compariſon of that yoke which muſt be brought upon us by any other ſyſtem of living,—and the

text tells of wiſdom—by which he means Religion, that it has pleaſantneſs in its way, as well as glory in its end—that it will bring us peace and joy ſuch as the world cannot give.—So that upon examining the truth of this aſſertion, we ſhall be ſet right in this error, by ſeeing that a religious man's happineſs does not ſtand at ſo tedious a diſtance—but is ſo preſent and indeed ſo inſeparable from him, as to be felt and taſted every hour—and of this even the vicious can hardly be inſenſible, from what he may perceive to ſpring up in his mind, from any caſual act of virtue. And tho' it is a pleaſure that properly belongs to the good—yet let any one try the experiment,

and

and he will ſee what is meant by that moral delight, ariſing from the conſcience of well-doing.—Let him but refreſh the bowels of the needy—let him comfort the broken-hearted—or check an appetite, or overcome a temptation—or receive an affront with temper and meekneſs—and he ſhall find the tacit praiſe of what he has done, darting thro' his mind, accompanied with a ſincere pleaſure—conſcience playing the monitor even to the looſe and moſt inconſiderate, in their moſt caſual acts of well-doing, and is, like a voice whiſpering behind and ſaying—this is the way of pleaſantneſs—this is the path of peace—walk in it.—

But

But to do further juſtice to the text, we muſt look beyond this inward recompence which is always inſeparable from virtue—and take a view of the outward advantages, which are as inſeparable from it, and which the Apoſtle particularly refers to, when 'tis ſaid, Godlineſs has the promiſe of this life, as well as that which is to come—and in this argument it is, that religion appears in all its glory and ſtrength—unanſwerable in all its obligations—that beſides the principal work which it does for us in ſecuring our future well-being in the other world, it is likewiſe the moſt effectual means to promote our preſent—and that not only *morally*, upon account of that reward which virtuous

virtuous actions do entitle a man unto from a just and a wise providence,—but by a natural tendency in themselves, which the duties of religion have *to procure* us riches, health, reputation, credit, and all those things, wherein our temporal happiness is thought to consist,—and this not only in promoting the well-being of particular persons, but of public communities and of mankind in general,—agreeable to what the wise man has left us on record, that righteousness exalteth a nation:—insomuch,—that could we, in considering this argument, suppose ourselves to be in a capacity of expostulating with God, concerning the terms upon which

which we would ſubmit to his government,—and to chuſe the laws ourſelves which we would be bound to obſerve, it would be impoſſible for the wit of man to frame any other propoſals, which upon all accounts would be more advantageous to our own intereſts than thoſe very conditions to which we are obliged by the rules of religion and virtue.—And in this does the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, and the beauty and wiſdom of providence appear moſt eminently towards mankind, in governing us by ſuch laws, as do moſt apparently tend to make us happy,—and in a word, in making that (in his mercy) to be our duty, which in his wiſdom he knows to be our intereſt,—that is

to

to ſay, what is moſt conducive to the eaſe and comfort of our mind,—the health and ſtrength of our body,—the honour and proſperity of our ſtate and condition,—the friendſhip and good will of our fellow creatures;—to the attainment of all which, no more effectual means can poſſibly be made uſe of, than that plain direction,—to lead an uncorrupted life, and to do the thing which is right, to uſe no deceit in our tongue, nor do evil to our neighbour.

For the better imprinting of which truth in your memories, give me leave to offer a few things to your conſideration.

The

The firſt is,—that juſtice and honeſty contribute very much towards all the faculties of the mind: I mean, that it clears up the underſtanding from that miſt, which dark and crooked deſigns are apt to raiſe in it,—and that it keeps up a regularity in the affections, by ſuffering no luſts or *by-ends* to diſorder them.—That it likewiſe preſerves the mind from all damps of grief and melancholy, which are the ſure conſequences of unjuſt actions; and that by ſuch an improvement of the faculties, it makes a man ſo much the abler to diſcern, and ſo much the more chearful, active and diligent to mind his buſineſs.—Light is ſown for the righteous, ſays the

the prophet, and gladneſs for the upright in heart.—

Secondly, let it be obſerved,—that in the continuance and courſe of a virtuous man's affairs, there is little probability of his falling into conſiderable diſappointments or calamities;—not only becauſe guarded by the providence of God, but that honeſty is in its own nature the freeſt from danger.

Firſt, becauſe ſuch a one lays no projects, which it is the intereſt of another to blaſt, and therefore needs no indirect methods or deceitful practices to ſecure his intereſt by undermining others.—The paths of virtue

virtue are plain and ſtrait, ſo that the blind, perſons of the meaneſt capacity, ſhall not err.—Diſhoneſty requires ſkill to conduct it, and as great art to conceal—what 'tis every one's intereſt to detect. And I think I need not remind you how oft it happens in attempts of this kind—where worldly men, in haſte to be rich, have over-run the only means to it,—and for want of laying their contrivances with proper cunning, or managing them with proper ſecrecy and advantage, have loſt for ever, what they might have certainly ſecured by honeſty and plain-dealing.—The general cauſes of the diſappointments in their buſineſs, or of unhappineſs in their lives, lying but too manifeſtly in their

their own diſorderly paſſions, which by attempting to carry them a ſhorter way to riches and honour, diſappoint them of both for ever, and make plain their ruin is from themſelves, and that they eat the fruits, which their own hands have watered and ripened.

Conſider, in the third place, that as the religious and moral man (one of which he cannot be without the other) not only takes the ſureſt courſe for ſucceſs in his affairs, but is diſpoſed to procure a help, which never enters into the thoughts of a wicked one: for being conſcious of upright intentions, he can look towards heaven, and with ſome aſſurance recom-

mend his affairs to God's bleſſing and direction:—whereas the fraudulent and diſhoneſt Man, dares not call for God's bleſſing upon his deſigns,—or if he does, he knows it is in vain to expect it.—Now a man who believes that he has God on his ſide, acts with another ſort of life and courage, than he who knows he ſtands alone;—like Eſau, with his hand againſt every man, and every man's hand againſt his.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry,—but the face of the Lord is againſt them that do evil.

Conſider, in the fourth place, that in all good governments who under-

ſtand

ſtand their own intereſt, the upright and honeſt man ſtands much fairer for preferment, and much more likely to be employed in all things when fidelity is wanted:—for all men, however the caſe ſtands with themſelves, they love at leaſt to find honeſty in thoſe they truſt; nor is there any uſage we more hardly digeſt, than that of being outwitted and deceived.—This is ſo true an obſervation, that the greateſt knaves have no other way to get into buſineſs, but by counterfeiting honeſty, and pretending to be what they are not; and when the impoſture is diſcovered, as it is a thouſand to one but it will, I have juſt ſaid, what muſt be the certain conſequence:—

for when ſuch a one falls,—he has none to help him,—ſo he ſeldom riſes again.—

This brings us to a fifth particular in vindication of the text,—That a virtuous man has this ſtrong advantage on his ſide (the reverſe of the laſt) that the more and the longer he is known, ſo much the better is he loved,—ſo much the more truſted;—ſo that his reputation and his fortune have a gradual increaſe:—and if calamities or croſs accidents ſhould bear him down,— (as no one ſtands out of their reach in this world)—if he ſhould fall, who would not pity his diſtreſs,—who would not ſtretch forth his hand to raiſe him from the ground!—

ground!—wherever there was virtue, he might expect to meet a friend and brother.—And this is not merely ſpeculation, but fact, confirmed by numberleſs examples in life, of men falling into misfortunes, whoſe character and tried probity have raiſed them helps, and bore them up, when every other help has forſook them.

Laſtly, to ſum up the account of the temporal advantages which probity has on its ſide,—let us not forget that greateſt of all happineſs, which the text refers to,—in the expreſſion of all its paths being peace,—peace and content of mind, ariſing from the conſciouſneſs of virtue, which is the

true and only foundation of all earthly ſatisfaction; and where that is wanting, whatever other enjoyments you beſtow upon a wicked man, they will as ſoon add a cubit to his ſtature as to his happineſs.—In the midſt of the higheſt entertainments,—this, like the hand-writing upon the wall, will be enough to ſpoil and diſreliſh the feaſt;—but much more ſo, when the tumult and hurry of delight is over,—when all is ſtill and ſilent,—when the ſinner has nothing to do but attend its laſhes and remorſes;—and this, in ſpite of all the common arts of diverſion, will be often the caſe of every wicked man;—for we cannot live always upon the ſtretch;—our faculties will not bear conſtant

pleaſure

pleaſure any more than conſtant pain;—there will be ſome vacancies; and when there are, they will be ſure to be filled with uncomfortable thoughts and black reflections.—So that, ſetting aſide the great after-reckoning, the pleaſures of the wicked are over-bought, even in this world.—

I conclude with one obſervation upon the whole of this argument, which is this—

Notwithſtanding the great force with which it has been often urged by good writers,—there are many caſes which it may not reach,—wherein vicious men may ſeem to enjoy their portion of this life,—and

live as happy, and fall into as few troubles as other men:—and, therefore, it is prudent not to lay more ſtreſs upon this argument than it will bear:—but always remember to call into our aid, that great and more unanſwerable argument, which will anſwer the moſt doubtful caſes which can be ſtated,—and that is, certainty of a future life, which chriſtianity has brought to light.—However men may differ in their opinions of the uſefulneſs of virtue for our preſent purpoſes,—no one was ever ſo abſurd, as to deny it ſerved our beſt and our laſt intereſt,—when the little intereſts of this life were at an end:—upon which conſideration we ſhould always lay the great weight which it

is

is fitteſt to bear, as the ſtrongeſt appeal, and moſt unchangeable motive that can govern our actions at all times.—However, as every good argument on the ſide of religion ſhould in proper times be made uſe of,—it is fit ſometimes to examine this,—by proving virtue is not even deſtitute of a preſent reward,—but carries in her hand a ſufficient recompence for all the ſelf-denials ſhe may occaſion:—ſhe is pleaſant in the way,—as well as in the end;—her ways being ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths peace.—But it is her greateſt and moſt diſtinguiſhed glory,—that ſhe befriends us hereafter, and brings us peace at the laſt;—

laſt;—and this is a portion ſhe can never be diſinherited of,—which may God of his mercy grant us all, for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt.

SER-

SERMON II.

Our Converſation in Heaven.

SERMON II.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20. 1ſt Part.

For our converſation is in heaven.

THESE words are the concluſion of the account which St. Paul renders of himſelf, to juſtify that particular part of his conduct and proceeding,—his leaving ſo ſtrangely, and deſerting his Jewiſh rites and ceremonies, to which he was known to have been formerly ſo much attached, and in defence of which he had been ſo warmly and ſo remarkably engaged. This, as it had been matter of provocation againſt him

him amongſt his own countrymen the Jews, ſo was it no leſs an occaſion of ſurprize to the Gentiles;—that a perſon of his great character, intereſt and reputation,—one who was deſcended from a tribe of Iſrael, deeply ſkilled in the profeſſions, and zealous in the *obſervances of the ſtraiteſt ſect of that religion*; who had their tenets inſtilled into him from his tender years, under the inſtitution of the ableſt maſters;—a Phariſee himſelf,—the ſon of a Phariſee, and brought up at the feet of Gamaliel,—one that was ſo deeply intereſted, and an acceſſary in the perſecution of another religion, juſt then newly come up;—a religion to which his whole ſect, as well as himſelf, had

been always the bittereſt and moſt inveterate enemies, and were conſtantly upbraided as ſuch, by the firſt founder of it;—that a perſon ſo beſet, and hem'd in with intereſts and prejudices on all ſides, ſhould after all turn proſelyte to the very religion he had hated;—a religion too, under the moſt univerſal contempt of any then in the world,—the chiefs and leaders of it men of the loweſt birth and education, without any advantages of parts or learning, or other endowments to recommend them:—that he ſhould quit and abandon all his former privileges, to become merely a fellow-labourer with theſe,—that he ſhould give up the reputation he had acquired amongſt his

his brethren by the ſtudy and labours of a whole life;—that he ſhould give up his friends,—his relations and family, from whom he eſtranged and baniſhed himſelf for life;—this was an event ſo very extraordinary,—ſo odd and unaccountable,—that it might well confound the minds of men to anſwer for it.—It was not to be accounted for upon the common rules and meaſures of proceeding in human life.—

The apoſtle, therefore, ſince no one elſe could ſo well do it for him, comes, in this chapter, to give an explanation why he had thus forſaken ſo many worldly advantages,—which was owing to a greater and more

unconquerable affection to a better and more valuable intereſt,—that in the poor perſecuted faith,—which he had once reproached and deſtroyed,—he had now found ſuch a fullneſs of divine grace,—ſuch unfathomable depths of God's infinite mercy, and love towards mankind, that he could think nothing too much to part with in order to his embracing chriſtianity;—nay, he accounted all things but loſs,—that is, leſs than nothing, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt.

The apoſtle, after this apology for himſelf,—proceeds, in the ſecond verſe before the text, to give a very different repreſentation of the worldly

views and ſenſual principles of other pretending teachers,—who had ſet themſelves up as an example for men to walk by, againſt whom he renews this caution:—For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies to the croſs of Chriſt,—whoſe end is deſtruction,—whoſe God is their belly, and whoſe glory is in their ſhame, who mind earthly things,---*φρονοῦντες*,---reliſh them, making them the only object of their wiſhes,—taking aim at nothing better, and nothing higher.—But *our* converſation, ſays he in the text, is in heaven.—We chriſtians, who have embraced a perſecuted faith, are governed by other conſiderations,—

have greater and nobler views;—here we conſider ourſelves only as pilgrims and ſtrangers.—Our home is in another country, where we are continually tending; there our hearts and affections are placed; and when the few days of our pilgrimage ſhall be over, there ſhall we return, where a quiet habitation and a perpetual reſt is deſigned and prepared for us for ever.—Our converſation is in heaven, from whence, ſays he, we alſo look for the Saviour, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall change our vile body, that it may be faſhioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to ſubdue all things unto him.—It is obſervable,

that St. Peter repreſents the ſtate of chriſtians under the ſame image, of ſtrangers on earth, whoſe city and proper home, is heaven:—he makes uſe of that relation of citizens of heaven, as a ſtrong argument for a pure and holy life,—beſeeching them *as* pilgrims and ſtrangers *here*, as men whoſe intereſts and connections are of ſo ſhort a date, and ſo trifling a nature,—to abſtain from fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul, that is, unfit it for its heavenly country, and give it a diſreliſh to the enjoyment of that pure and ſpiritualized happineſs, of which that region muſt conſiſt, wherein there ſhall in no wiſe enter any thing that defileth, neither whatſoever worketh abomination.—

The

The apoſtle tells us, that without holineſs no man ſhall ſee God;—by which no doubt he means, that a virtuous life is the only medium of happineſs and terms of ſalvation,—which can only give us admiſſion into heaven.—But ſome of our divines carry the aſſertion further, that without holineſs,—without ſome previous ſimilitude wrought in the faculties of the mind, correſponding with the nature of the pureſt of beings, who is to be the object of our fruition hereafter;—that it is not morally only, but phyſically impoſſible for it to be happy,—and that an impure and polluted ſoul, is not only unworthy of ſo pure a preſence as the

ſpirit of God, but even incapable of enjoying it, could it be admitted.

And here, not to feign a long hypotheſis, as ſome have done, of a ſinner's being admitted into heaven, with a particular deſcription of his condition and behaviour there,—we need only conſider, that the ſupreme good, like any other good, is of a relative nature, and conſequently the enjoyment of it muſt require ſome qualification in the faculty, as well as the enjoyment of any other good does;—there muſt be ſomething antecedent in the diſpoſition and temper, which will render that good a good to that individual,—otherwiſe though (it is true) it may be poſ-

ſeſſed,—

ſeſſed,—yet it never can be enjoyed.—

Preach to a voluptuous epicure, who knows of no other happineſs in this world, but what ariſes from good eating and drinking;—ſuch a one, in the apoſtle's language, whoſe God was his belly;—preach to him of the abſtractions of the ſoul, tell of its flights, and briſker motion in the pure regions of immenſity;—repreſent to him that ſaints and angels eat not,—but that the ſpirit of a man lives for ever upon wiſdom and holineſs, and heavenly contemplations:—why, the only effect would be, that the fat glutton would ſtare a while upon the preacher, and in a few

minutes fall faſt aſleep.—No; if you would catch his attention, and make him take in your diſcourſe greedily,—you muſt preach to him out of the Alcoran,—talk of the raptures of ſenſual enjoyments, and of the pleaſures of the perpetual feaſting, which Mahomet has deſcribed;—there you touch upon a note which awakens and ſinks into the inmoſt receſſes of his ſoul;—without which, diſcourſe as wiſely and abſtractedly as you will of heaven, your repreſentations of it, however glorious and exalted, will paſs like the ſongs of melody over an ear incapable of diſcerning the diſtinction of ſounds.—

We

We ſee, even in the common intercourſes of ſociety,—how tedious it is to be in the company of a perſon whoſe humour is diſagreeable to our own, though perhaps in all other reſpects of the greateſt worth and excellency.—How then can we imagine that an ill-diſpoſed ſoul, whoſe converſation never reached to heaven, but whoſe appetites and deſires, to the laſt hour, have grovel'd upon this unclean ſpot of earth;—how can we imagine it ſhould hereafter take pleaſure in God, or be able to taſte joy or ſatisfaction from his preſence, who is ſo infinitely pure, that he even putteth no truſt in his ſaints,—nor are the heavens themſelves (as Job ſays) clean in his ſight.—

ſight.—The conſideration of this has led ſome writers ſo far, as to ſay, with ſome degree of irreverence in the expreſſion,—that it was not in the power of God to make a wicked man happy, if the ſoul was ſeparated from the body, with all its vicious habits and inclinations unreformed;—which thought, a very able divine in our church has purſued ſo far, as to declare his belief,—that could the happieſt manſion in heaven be ſuppoſed to be allotted to a groſs and polluted ſpirit, it would be ſo far from being happy in it, that it would do penance there to all eternity:—by which he meant, it would carry ſuch appetites along with it, for which there could be found no ſuitable

able objects.—A ſufficient cauſe for conſtant torment;—for thoſe that it found there, would be ſo diſproportioned, that they would rather vex and upbraid it, than ſatisfy its wants.—This, it is true, is mere ſpeculation,—and what concerns us not to know;—it being enough for our purpoſe, that ſuch an experiment is never likely to be tried,—that we ſtand upon different terms with God,—that a virtuous life is the foundation of all our happineſs,—that as God has no pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall any evil dwell with him;—and that, if we expect our happineſs to be in heaven,—we muſt have our converſation in heaven, whilſt upon earth,—make it the frequent ſubject of our

thoughts

thoughts and meditations,—let every ſtep we take tend that way,—every action of our lives be conducted by that great mark of the prize of our high-calling, forgetting thoſe things which are behind;—forgetting this world,---diſengaging our thoughts and affections from it, and thereby tranſforming them to the likeneſs of what we hope to be hereafter.—How can we expect the inheritance of the ſaints of light, upon other terms than what they themſelves obtained it?—

Can that body expect to riſe and ſhine in glory, that is a ſlave to luſt, or dies in the fiery purſuit of an impure deſire? Can that heart ever become

come the lightſome ſeat of peace and joy, that burns hot as an oven with anger, rage, envy, luſt, and ſtrife? full of wicked imaginations, ſet only to deviſe and entertain evil?

Can that fleſh appear in the laſt day, and inherit the kingdom of heaven in the glorified ſtrength of perpetual youth, that is now clearly conſumed in intemperance,—ſinks in the ſurfeit of continual drunkenneſs and gluttony, and then tumbles into the grave, and almoſt pollutes the ground that is under it?—Can we reaſonably ſuppoſe, that head ſhall ever wear or become the crown of righteouſneſs and peace, in which dwells nothing but craft and avarice,

deceit and fraud and treachery,—which is always plodding upon worldly deſigns, racked with ambition,—rent aſunder with diſcord,—ever delighting in miſchief to others, and unjuſt advantages to itſelf?—Shall that tongue, which is the glory of a man when rightly directed,—be ever ſet to God's heavenly praiſes, and warble forth the harmonies of the bleſſed, that is now full of curſing and bitterneſs, backbiting and ſlander, under which is ungodlineſs and vanity and the poiſon of aſps?

Can it enter into our hearts even to hope, that thoſe hands can ever receive the reward of righteouſneſs, that are full of blood, laden with the

the wages of iniquity, of theft, rapin, violence, extortion, or other unlawful gain? or that thoſe feet ſhall ever be beautiful upon the mountains of light and joy, that were never ſhod for the preparation of the goſpel,—that have run quite out of the way of God's word,—and made haſte only to do evil?—no ſurely.—In this ſenſe,—he that is unjuſt, let him be unjuſt ſtill,—and he which is filthy, let him be filthy ſtill.

How inconſiſtent the whole body of ſin is, with the glories of the celeſtial body that ſhall be revealed hereafter,—and that in proportion as we fix the repreſentation of theſe glories upon our minds, and in the more

more numerous particulars we do it,—the ſtronger the neceſſity as well as perſuaſion to deny ourſelves all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent world, as the only way to entitle us to that bleſſedneſs ſpoken of in the Revelations—of thoſe who do his commandments, and have a right to the tree of life, and ſhall enter into the gates of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jeruſalem, and to an innumerable company of angels;—to the general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born, that are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect,—who have waſhed their robes, and made

them

them white in the blood of the Lamb.—

May God give us grace to live under the perpetual influence of this expectation,—that by the habitual impreſſion of theſe glories upon our imaginations, and the frequent ſending forth our thoughts and employing them on the other world,—we may diſentangle them from this,—and by ſo having our converſation in heaven whilſt we are here, we may be thought fit inhabitants for it hereafter;—that when God at the laſt day ſhall come with thouſands and ten thouſands of his ſaints to judge the world, we may enter with them into happineſs, and with angels and

arch-angels, and all the company of heaven, we may praiſe and magnify his glorious name, and enjoy his preſence for ever. Amen.

SER-

SERMON III.

Deſcription of the World.

SERMON III.

2 PETER iii. 11.

Seeing then, that all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved,—what manner of perſons ought ye to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs? looking and haſtening unto the coming of God.

THE ſubject upon which St. Peter is diſcourſing in this chapter, is the certainty of Chriſt's coming to judge the world;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the repreſentation he gives of it,—in which, in anſwer to the cavils of the ſcoffers

in the latter days, concerning the delay of his coming,—he tells them, that God is not ſlack concerning his promiſes, as ſome men count ſlackneſs, but is long ſuffering to us ward;—*that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, the earth alſo, and the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up.*—Seeing then, ſays he, all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved, what manner of perſons ought ye to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs?—The inference is unavoidable,—at leaſt in theory, however it fails in practice;—how widely theſe two differ, I intend to make the ſubject of this diſcourſe;

diſcourſe; and though it is a melancholy compariſon, to conſider, 'what manner of perſons we *really* are,' with 'what manner of perſons we *ought* to be,' yet as the knowledge of the one, is at leaſt one ſtep towards the improvement in the other,—the parallel will not be thought to want its uſe.

Give me leave, therefore, in the firſt place, to recall to your obſervations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of perſons we really are.

Secondly, and in oppoſition to this, I ſhall make uſe of the apoſtle's argument, and from a brief repreſentation of the chriſtian religion, and the obligations it lays upon us, ſhew,

what manner of perſons we *ought* to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs, looking for and haſtening unto the coming of the day of God.

Whoever takes a view of the world will, I fear, be able to diſcern, but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants.—Of all the ends and purſuits we are looking for, and haſtening unto,—this would be the leaſt ſuſpected,—for without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedneſs of the age,—we may ſay within the bounds of truth,—that there is as little influence from this principle which the apoſtle lays ſtreſs on, and as little ſenſe of religion,—

as

as ſmall a ſhare of virtue (at leaſt as little of the appearance of it) as can be ſuppoſed to exiſt at all in a country where it is countenanced by the ſtate.—The degeneracy of the times, has been the common complaint of many ages:—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that God who trieth the hearts.—But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they ſtudied at leaſt to preſerve the appearance of virtue;—publick vice was branded with publick infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The ſervice of God was regularly attended, and religion not expoſed to the reproaches of the ſcorner.

How the caſe ſtands with us at preſent in each of theſe particulars, it is grievous to report, and perhaps unacceptable to religion herſelf; yet as this is a ſeaſon wherein it is fit we ſhould be told of our faults, let us for a moment impartially conſider the articles of this charge.

And firſt, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at preſent upon the lives and behaviour of the preſent times;—concerning which I have ſaid, that if we are to truſt appearances, there is as little as can well be ſuppoſed to exiſt at all in a chriſtian country.—Here I ſhall ſpare exclamations, and avoiding all common place railing upon

upon the ſubject, confine myſelf to facts, ſuch as every one who looks out into the world, and makes any obſervations at all, will vouch for me.

Now whatever are the degrees of real religion amongſt us,—whatever they are, the appearances are ſtrong againſt the charitable ſide of the queſtion.—

If religion is any where to be found, one would think it would be amongſt thoſe of the higher rank in life, whoſe education and opportunities of knowing its great importance, ſhould have brought them over to its intereſt, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it, as eminent

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in its example.—But if you examine the fact, you will almoſt find it a teſt of a politer education and mark of more ſhining parts, to know nothing, and indeed, care nothing at all about it:—or if the ſubject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more ſprightly wits,—that it ſerves no other purpoſe, but that of being made merry at, and of being reſerved, as a ſtanding jeſt to enliven diſcourſe, when converſation ſickens upon their hands.—

This is too ſore an evil not to be obſerved amongſt perſons of all ages, in what is called higher life; and ſo early does the contempt of this great concern begin to ſhew itſelf—that it is

no

no uncommon thing to hear perſons diſputing againſt religion, and raiſing cavils againſt the Bible, at an age when ſome of them would be hard ſet to read a chapter in it.—And I may add, that of thoſe whoſe ſtock in knowledge is ſomewhat larger, that for the moſt part it has ſcarce any other foundation to reſt on but the ſinking credit of traditional and ſecond-hand objections againſt revelation, which had they leiſure to read, they would find anſwered and confuted a thouſand times over.—But this by the way.—

If we take a view of the public worſhip of Almighty God, and obſerve in what manner it is reverenced by perſons in this rank of life, whoſe duty it is to ſet an example

ple to the poor and ignorant, we ſhall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument—of a general want of all outward demonſtration of a ſenſe of our duty towards God, as if religion was a buſineſs fit only to employ tradeſmen and mechanics—and the ſalvation of our ſouls, a concern utterly below the conſideration of a perſon of figure and conſequence.—

I ſhall ſay nothing at preſent of the lower ranks of mankind—though they have not yet got into the faſhion of laughing at religion, and treating it with ſcorn and contempt, and I believe are too ſerious a ſet of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt

it is held in by thoſe whoſe examples they are too apt to imitate, will in time utterly ſhake their principles, and render them, if not as prophane, at leaſt as corrupt as their betters.—When this event happens—and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them, thoſe who have done the miſchief will find the neceſſity at laſt of turning religious in their own defence, and for want of a better principle, to ſet an example of piety and good morals for their own intereſt and convenience.—

Thus much for the languiſhing ſtate of religion in the preſent age;—in virtue and good morals perhaps the account may ſtand higher.——

Let

Let us enquire——

And here, I acknowledge, that an unexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honesty, and how unanimous we were all in our cry against vicious characters of all denominations, would be apt hastily to conclude, that the whole world was in an uproar about it—and that there was so general a horrour and detestation of vice amongst us, that mankind were all associating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter.—This I own would be a natural conclusion for any one who only trusted his ears upon this subject.—But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence

evidence than hear-ſay—let us ſee in the preſent how the one caſe is contradicted by the other.——

However vehement we approve ourſelves in diſcourſe againſt vice—I believe no one is ignorant that the reception it actually meets with is very different—the conduct and behaviour of the world is ſo oppoſite to their language, and all we hear ſo contradicted by what we ſee, as to leave little room to queſtion which ſenſe we are to truſt.——

Look, I beſeech you, amongſt thoſe whoſe higher ſtations are made a ſhelter for the liberties they take, you will ſee, that no man's character

is ſo infamous, nor any woman's ſo abandoned, as not to be viſited and admitted freely into all companies, and, if the party can pay for it, even publicly to be courted, careſſed, and flattered.—If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue,—take a ſhort view of the general decay of it, from the faſhionable exceſſes of the age,—in favour of which there ſeems to be formed ſo ſtrong a party, that a man of ſobriety, temperance, and regularity, ſcarce knows how to accommodate himſelf to the ſociety he lives in,—and is oft as much at a loſs how and where to diſpoſe of himſelf;—and unleſs you ſuppoſe a mixture of conſtancy in his temper, it is great odds but ſuch a one would

be ridiculed, and laughed out of his ſcruples and his virtue at the ſame time;—to ſay nothing of occaſional rioting, chambering and wantonneſs.—Conſider how many public markets are eſtabliſhed merely for the ſale of virtue,—where the manner of going, too ſadly indicates the intention;—and the diſguiſe each is under, not only gives power ſafely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.—

This ſinning under diſguiſe, I own, ſeems to carry ſome appearance of a ſecret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as ſuch, was it not the only public inſtance the world ſeems to give of it.—In

other caſes, a juſt ſenſe of ſhame ſeems a matter of ſo little concern, that inſtead of any regularity of behaviour, you ſee thouſands who are tired with the very form of it, and who at length have even thrown the maſk of it aſide, as a uſeleſs piece of incumbrance.—This I believe will need no evidence; it is too evidently ſeen in the open liberties taken every day, in defiance (not to ſay of religion) but of decency and common good manners;—ſo that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices, which heretofore were committed only in dark corners, now openly ſhew their face in broad day, and oft times with ſuch an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himſelf

himſelf honour,—or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a ſtate of guilt, was as neceſſary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.—

If we paſs on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is a ſofter name for vices) you will ſcarce ſee any thing, in what is called higher life, but what beſpeaks a general relaxation of all order and diſcipline, in which our opinions as well as manners ſeem to be ſet looſe from all reſtraints;—and, in truth, from all ſerious reflections too:—and one may venture to ſay, that

gaming and extravagance, to the utter ruin of the greateſt eſtates,—minds diſſipated with diverſions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the moſt general characters to be met with; and though one would expect, that at leaſt the more ſolemn ſeaſons of the year, ſet apart for the contemplation of Chriſt's ſufferings, ſhould give ſome check and interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongſt us, that it is ſo;—what one alteration does it make in the courſe of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification inſulted by the ſame luxury of entertainments at our tables?—is not the ſame order of diverſions perpetually returning, and ſcarce any thing elſe thought

thought of?—does not the ſame levity in dreſs, as well as diſcourſe, ſhew itſelf in perſons of all ages? I ſay of all ages, for it is no ſmall aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which by its authority was once able to frown youth into ſobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, ſeems but too often to lead the way,—and by their unſeaſonable example give a countenance to follies and weakneſs, which youth is but too apt to run into without ſuch a recommendation. —Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, ſhould have nothing about it, but what looks like a decent preparation for it.—In purer times it was the caſe,—but now,—

grey hairs themſelves ſcarce ever appear, but in the high mode and flanting garb of youth,—with heads as full of pleaſure, and cloaths as ridiculouſly, and as much in the faſhion, as the perſon who wears them is uſually grown out of it:—upon which article give me leave to make a ſhort reflection; which is this, that whenever the eldeſt equal the youngeſt in the vanity of their dreſs, there is no reaſon to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not ſurpaſs them, in the vanity of their deſires.—

But this by the by.—

Though in truth the obſervation falls in with the main intention of this

this diſcourſe,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light hand, but plainly to point them out; that by recalling to your mind, what manner of perſons we really are, I might better lead you to the apoſtle's inference, of what manner of perſons ye ought to be, in all holy converſation and godlineſs? looking for, and haſtening unto the coming of the day of God.—

The apoſtle, in the concluding verſe of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for ſuch things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without ſpot, and blameleſs;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either the

the reaſon or the paſſions of men are to be wrought upon at all, it muſt be from the force and influence of this awakening conſideration in the text:—"That all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved,—that this vain and periſhable ſcene muſt change, that we who now tread the ſtage, muſt ſhortly be ſummoned away;—that we are creatures but of a day, haſtening unto the place from whence we ſhall return no more;—that whilſt we are here,—our conduct and behaviour is minutely obſerved;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whoſe omniſcient eye ſpies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the paſſages of our lives;—that theſe volumes

ſhall

ſhall be produced and opened, and men ſhall be judged out of the things that are written in them;—that without reſpect of perſons, we ſhall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words and actions to this greateſt and beſt of Beings, before whoſe judgment-ſeat we muſt finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good, or whether they are bad.—

That to add to the terror of it,—this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night;—of that hour no one knoweth;—that we are not ſure of its being ſuſpended one day or one hour; or, what is the ſame caſe,—that we are ſtanding upon the edge

edge of a precipice, with nothing but the ſingle thread of human life to hold us up;—and that if we fall unprepared in this thoughtleſs ſtate, we are loſt, and muſt periſh for evermore.—

What manner of perſons we ought to be, upon theſe principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy converſation and godlineſs;—and I ſhall only remind, how different a frame of mind, the looking for, and haſtening unto the coming of God, under ſuch a life, is, from that of ſpending our days in vanity, and our years in pleaſure.—

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude in that merciful warning, which

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our Saviour, the judge himſelf, hath given us, at the cloſe of the ſame exhortation.—

Take heed to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be over-charged with ſurfeiting, and drunkenneſs, and the cares of this life;—and ſo that day come upon you unawares;—for as a ſnare ſhall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.—Watch therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to eſcape all theſe things that ſhall come to paſs, and to ſtand before the Son of man. Which may God of his mercy grant, through Jeſus Chriſt. Amen.

SERMON IV.

ST. PETER's Character.

SERMON IV.

Acts iii. 12.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

THESE words, as the text tells us, were spoke by St. Peter, on the occasion of his miraculous cure of the lame man, who was laid at the gate of the temple, and, in the beginning of this chapter, had asked an alms of St. Peter and St. John, as

they went up together at the hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter faſtening his eyes, as in the 4th verſe, and declaring he had no ſuch relief to give him as he expected, having neither ſilver nor gold,—but that ſuch as he had, the benefit of that divine power which he had received from his Maſter, he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth, to riſe up and walk.—And he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ancle-bones received ſtrength; and he leaped up, ſtood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praiſing God.—

It ſeems he had been born lame, had paſſed a whole life of deſpair, without hopes of ever being reſtored; —ſo that the immediate ſenſe of ſtrength and activity communicated to him at once, in ſo ſurpriſing and unſought-for a manner, caſt him into the tranſport of mind natural to a man ſo benefited beyond his expectation.—So that the amazing inſtance of a ſupernatural power;—the notoriety of fact, wrought at the hour of prayer;—the unexceptionableneſs of the object,—that it was no impoſture, —for they knew that it was he which ſat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple;—the unfeigned expreſſions of an enraptured heart almoſt beſide itſelf, confirming the whole;—

the man that was healed, in the 10th verſe, holding his benefactors, Peter and John, entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praiſing God;—the great concourſe of people, drawn together by this event, in the 11th verſe, for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering.—Sure never was ſuch a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have eſtabliſhed a character of ſuperior goodneſs and power.—To a man ſet upon this world, who ſought his own praiſe and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned theſe circumſtances to ſuch a purpoſe;—to have fallen in with the paſſions of an aſtoniſhed and grateful

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city, prepoſſeſſed, from what had happened, ſo ſtrongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requiſite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the higheſt reverence of his ſanctity, awe of his perſon, or whatever other belief ſhould be neceſſary to feed his pride, or ſerve ſecret ends of glory and intereſt.—A mind not ſufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to God—and transferred it to himſelf.—He might—not ſo—a diſciple of Chriſt: for when Peter ſaw it, —when he ſaw the propenſity in them to be miſled on this occaſion,—he anſwered and ſaid unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of Iſrael,

why marvel ye at this? or why look you ſo earneſtly on us, as though by our own power and holineſs we had made this man to walk?—the God of Abraham, and of Iſaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his ſon Jeſus.——

O holy, and bleſſed apoſtle!

How would thy meek and mortified ſpirit ſatisfy itſelf in uttering ſo humble and ſo juſt a declaration?—What an honeſt triumph wouldſt thou taſte the ſweets of,—in thus conquering thy paſſion of vain glory,—keeping down thy pride,—diſclaiming the praiſes which ſhould have fed it, by telling the wondering ſpectators,

tors, It was not thy own power,—it was not thy own holineſs, which had wrought this,—thou being of like paſſions and infirmities;—but that it was the power of the God of Abraham,—the holineſs of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who waſt but an inſtrument in his hands.—If thus honeſtly declining honour, which the occaſion ſo amply invited thee to take;—if this would give more ſatisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudeſt praiſes of a miſtaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection,—that in this inſtance of ſelf-denial—thou hadſt not only done well,—but, what was ſtill a more endearing thought, that thou

hadſt been able to copy the example of thy divine Maſter, who, in no action of his life, ſought ever his own praiſe, but on the contrary, declined all poſſible occaſions of it;—and in the only public inſtance of honour which he ſuffered to be given him in his entrance into Jeruſalem,—thou didſt remember,—it was accepted with ſuch a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hoſannas of the multitude, than in the meekneſs wherewith he received them, lowly, and ſitting upon an aſs.—How could a diſciple fail of profiting by the example of ſo humble a maſter, whoſe whole courſe of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every inſtance

inſtance of it, ſhewed plainly he came not to ſhare the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accompliſhed, by engroſſing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world; and by the ſplendour of his court, and dignity of his perſon, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applauſe and admiration of the world:—this every diſciple knew was in his power;—ſo that the meanneſs of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was engaged, by preaching the goſpel to the poor—the numberleſs dangers and inconveniences attending

attending the execution,—were all voluntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out of the meaneſt of the people,—amongſt whom he appeared rather as a ſervant than a maſter, coming not, as he often told them, to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter,—and as the prophet had foretold in that mournful deſcription of him, having no form nor comelineſs, nor any beauty that we ſhould deſire him.—

How could a diſciple, you'll ſay, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetic proofs of humility, which his memory would ſuggeſt had happened of a piece with it, in the courſe

courſe of his maſter's life;—but particularly at the concluſion and great cataſtrophe of it,—at his crucifixion; the impreſſions of which could never be forgotten.—When a life full of ſo many engaging inſtances of humility, was crowned with the moſt endearing one of humbling himſelf to the death of the croſs,—the death of a ſlave and a malefactor,—ſuffering himſelf to be led like a lamb to the ſlaughter,—dragged to Calvary without oppoſition or complaint, and as a ſheep before his ſhearer is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O bleſſed Jeſus! well might a diſciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou exhorteſt them

them all, for thou waſt meek and lowly:—well might they profit, when ſuch a leſſon was ſeconded by ſuch an example!—It is not to be doubted what force this muſt have had on the actions of thoſe who were attendants and conſtant followers of our Saviour on earth;—ſaw the meekneſs of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death, who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his reſcue, or by a ſingle act of omnipotence to have deſtroyed his enemies; yet ſuppreſſed his almighty power,—neither reſented—or revenged the indignity done him, but patiently ſuffered himſelf to be numbered with the tranſgreſſors.—

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It could not well be otherwiſe, but that every eye-witneſs of this muſt have been wrought upon, in ſome degree, as the apoſtle, to let the ſame mind be in him which alſo was in Chriſt Jeſus.—Nor will it be diſputed how much of the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the preſent tranſaction might be owing to the impreſſions he received, on that memorable occaſion of his Lord's death, ſinking ſtill deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many inſtances his maſter had given of this engaging virtue in the courſe of his life.—

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and ſenſible nature, as we may collect

lect from the ſacred writings,—a temper fitteſt to receive all the advantages which ſuch impreſſions could give;—and therefore, as it is a day and place ſacred to this great apoſtle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time, in a ſhort eſſay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular diſpoſition of heart, which is the ſubject of the diſcourſe.—

This great apoſtle was a man of diſtinction amongſt the diſciples, —and was one of ſuch virtues and qualifications, as ſeem'd to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years, or knowledge.—

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On his firſt admiſſion to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a moſt evident teſtimony that he was a man of real and tender goodneſs, when being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fiſhes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author muſt neceſſarily be from God, he fell down inſtantly at his feet,—broke out into this humble and pious reflection;—Depart from me, for I am a ſinful man, O Lord!—The cenſure, you will ſay, expreſſes him a ſinful man,—but ſo to cenſure himſelf,—with ſuch unaffected modeſty, implies more effectually than any thing elſe could,—that he was not in the common ſenſe of the word,—a ſinful, but a good man, who, like

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the publican in the temple, was no leſs juſtified, for a ſelf-accuſation extorted merely from the humility of a devout heart jealous of its own imperfections.—And though the words, *depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear,—yet he who heard them, and knew the heart of the ſpeaker, found they carried in them a greater meaſure of deſire.—For Peter was not willing to be diſcharged from his new gueſt, but fearing his unfitneſs to accompany him, longed to be made more worthy of his converſation.—A meek and modeſt diſtruſt of himſelf, ſeemed to have had no ſmall ſhare, at that time, in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved,

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and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and observation with his Lord and master,—yet it appears to have been an early and distinguishing part of his character.—An instance of this, though little in itself, and omitted by the other evangelists, is preserved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himself with a napkin, and washing the disciples feet; to which office, not one of them is represented as making any opposition: But when he came to Simon Peter,—the Evangelist tells,—Peter said to him,—Dost *Thou* wash my feet? Jesus said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt

know hereafter.—Peter ſaid to him,—Thou ſhalt never waſh my feet.—Humility for a moment triumphed over his ſubmiſſion,—and he expoſtulates with him upon it, with all the earneſt and tender oppoſition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with ſhame, that his Lord and maſter ſhould inſiſt to do ſo mean and painful an act of ſervitude to him.—

I would ſooner form a judgment of a man's temper from his behaviour on ſuch little occurrences of life, as theſe, than from the more weighed and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard;—has more preparation to diſguiſe the true diſ-

position of his heart,—and more temptation when disguised to impose it on others.—

This management was no part of Peter's character, who, with all the real and unaffected humility which he shewed, was possessed of such a quick sensibility and promptness of nature, which utterly unfitted him for art and premeditation;—though this particular cast of temper had its disadvantages, at the same time, as it led him to an unreserved discovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and sometimes in so open and unguarded a manner, as exposed him

to the ſharpneſs of a rebuke where he could leaſt bear it.—

I take notice of this, becauſe it will help us in ſome meaſure to reconcile a ſeeming contradiction in his character, which will naturally occur here, from conſidering that great and capital failing of his life, when by a preſumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the diſgrace of denying his Lord; in both of which he acted ſo oppoſite to the character here given, that you will aſk,—How could ſo humble a man as you deſcribe ever have been guilty of ſo ſelf-ſufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he ſhould die with his Maſter,—yet would he not

not deny him?—Or whence,—that ſo ſincere and honeſt a man was not better able to perform it?—

The caſe was this—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occaſion to admoniſh his diſciples of the peril of lapſing,—telling them, 31ſt verſe,—All ye ſhall be offended becauſe of me this night.—To which Peter anſwering, with a zeal mix'd with too much confidence,—That though all ſhould be offended, yet will I *never be offended*;—to check this truſt in himſelf,—our Saviour replies, that he in particular ſhould deny him *thrice*.—But Peter looking upon this mon-

tion no farther than as it implied a reproach to his faith, and his love, and his courage;—ſtung to the heart to have them called in queſtion by his Lord,—he haſtily ſummons them all up to form his final reſolution,—Though I ſhould die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.—The reſolve was noble and dutiful to the laſt degree,—and I make no doubt as honeſt a one—that is, both as juſt in the matter, and as ſincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind;—his character not ſuffering us to imagine he made it in a braving diſſimulation:—no;—for he proved himſelf ſufficiently in earneſt by his ſubſequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his ſword againſt

againſt a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had leſs concern for his own life, than he had for his maſter's ſafety.—How then came his reſolution to miſcarry?—The reaſon ſeems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himſelf,—doubted not but his will was in his power, whether God's grace aſſiſted him or not;—ſurely thinking, that what he had courage to reſolve ſo honeſtly, he had likewiſe ability to perform.—This was his miſtake,—and though it was a very great one,—yet was in ſome degree akin to a virtue,—as it ſprung merely from a conſciouſneſs of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a con-

cluſion of what they would enable him to perform, on the ſharpeſt encounters for his Maſter's ſake:—ſo that his failing in this point, was but a conſequence of this haſty and ill-conſidered reſolve;—and his Lord to rebuke and puniſh him for it, did no other than leave him to his own ſtrength to perform it;—which, in effect, was almoſt the ſame as leaving him to the neceſſity of not performing it at all.—The great apoſtle had not conſidered, that he who precautioned him was the ſearcher of hearts,—and needed not that any ſhould teſtify of man, for he knew what was in man:—he did not remember, that his Lord had ſaid before,—Without me ye can do nothing;—

thing;—that the execution of all our faculties were under the power of his will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth, on this one unhappy juncture,—where he had so great a temptation to the contrary,—though he was full of the perfuasion in every other tranſaction of his life,—but moſt viſibly here in the text,—where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart ſtill overflowing with remembrance of this very miſtake he had once committed;—Ye men of Iſrael, why marvel ye at this?—as though by our own power and holineſs we had wrought this?—The God of Abraham, of Iſaac, and of Jacob,—the God of our fathers, through faith in his name hath made

this

this man whole, whom ye ſee and know.—

This is the beſt anſwer I am able to make to this objection againſt the uniformity of the apoſtle's character which I have given:—upon which let it be added,—that was no ſuch apology capable of being made in its behalf;—that the truth and regularity of a character is not, in juſtice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one ſingle act or omiſſion which may ſeem a contradiction to it:—the beſt of men appear ſometimes to be ſtrange compounds of contradictory qualities: and were the accidental overſights and folly of the wiſeſt man,—the failings and imperfections

fections of a religious man,—the hafty acts and paſſionate words of a meek man;—were they to riſe up in judgment againſt them,—and an ill-natured judge be ſuffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiſs,—what character ſo unexceptionable as to be able to ſtand before him?—So that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a man may claim when he falls, through ſurprize more than a premeditation,—one may venture upon the whole to ſum up Peter's character in a few words.—He was a man ſenſible in his nature,—of quick paſſions, tempered with the greateſt humility and moſt unaffected poverty of ſpirit that ever met in ſuch a character.—So that in the

the only criminal inſtance of his life, which I have ſpoke to, you are at a loſs which to admire moſt;—the tenderneſs and ſenſibility of his ſoul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jeſus;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he teſtified thereupon, in the bitterneſs of his ſorrow for what he had done.—He was once preſumptuous in truſting to his own ſtrength; his general and true character was that of the moſt engaging meekneſs,—diſtruſtful of himſelf and his abilities to the laſt degree.—

He denied his maſter.—But in all inſtances of his life, but that, was a man of the greateſt truth and ſincerity;—to which part of his character

racter our Saviour has given an undeniable teſtimony, in conferring on him the cymbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the moſt expreſſive of conſtancy and firmneſs.—

He was a man of great love to his maſter,—and of no leſs zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I ſhall take one inſtance out of St. John, with which I ſhall conclude this account.—Where, upon the deſertion of ſeveral other diſciples,—our Saviour puts the queſtion to the twelve,—Will ye alſo go away?—Then, ſays the text, Peter anſwered and ſaid,—Lord! whither ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life,—and we believe, and know that

thou art Chriſt the ſon of God.—Now, if we look into the goſpel, we find what our Saviour pronounced on this very confeſſion.

Bleſſed art thou, Simon Barjona, for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,—but my Father which is in heaven.—That our Saviour had the words of eternal life,—Peter was able to deduce from principles of natural reaſon; becauſe reaſon was able to judge from the internal marks of his doctrine, that it was worthy God, and accommodated properly to advance human nature and human happineſs. —But for all this,—reaſon could not infallibly determine that the meſſenger of this doctrine was the Meſſias,

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the eternal ſon of the living God:—to know this required an illumination;—and this illumination, I ſay, ſeems to have been vouchſafed at that inſtant as a reward,—as would have been ſufficient evidence by itſelf of the diſpoſition of his heart.—

I have now finiſhed this ſhort eſſay upon the character of St. Peter, not with a loud panegyric upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon ſome monaſtic qualifications, with which a popiſh pulpit would ring upon ſuch an occaſion, without doing much honour to the ſaint, or good to the audience;—but have drawn it with truth and ſobriety, repreſenting it as it was, as conſiſting of

of virtues the moſt worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dreſſes out her ſaints on theſe days,—but upon matters of fact in the ſacred Scriptures, in which all chriſtians agree.—And ſince I have mentioned *popery*, I cannot better conclude than by obſerving, how ill the ſpirit and character of that church reſembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the ſubject of this diſcourſe.—Would one think that a church, which thruſts itſelf under this apoſtle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would preſume to exceed the degrees of it which he acknowledged to poſ-

ſeſs

ſeſs himſelf.—But how ill are your expectations anſwered, when inſtead of the humble declaration in the text, —Ye men of Iſrael, marvel not at us, as if our own power and holineſs had wrought this;—you hear a language and behaviour from the Romiſh court, as oppoſite to it as inſolent words and actions can frame.—

So that inſtead of, Ye men of Iſrael, marvel not at us,—Ye men of Iſrael, *do* marvel at us,—hold us in admiration:—Approach our ſacred pontiff, —(who is not only holy—but holineſs itſelf)—approach his perſon with reverence, and deem it the greateſt honour and happineſs of your lives to

fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiſs his feet.—

Think not, as if it were not our own holineſs which merits all the homage you can pay us.—It is our own holineſs,—the ſuperabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourſelves,—from works of ſupererogation, we have transferred the ſurplus in eccleſiaſtic ware-houſes, and in pure zeal for the good of your ſouls, have eſtabliſhed public banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times.—

Think not, ye men of Iſrael, or ſay within yourſelves, that we are unprofitable ſervants;—we have no good works

works to ſpare, or that if we had,—we cannot make this uſe of them;—that we have no power to circulate our indulgencies,—and huckſter them out, as we do, through all the parts of Chriſtendom.—Know ye by theſe preſents, that it is our own power which does this;—the plenitude of our apoſtolick power operating with our own holineſs that enables us to bind and looſe, as ſeems meet to us on earth;—to ſave your ſouls or deliver them up to Satan, and as they pleaſe or diſpleaſe, to indulge whole kingdoms at once, or excommunicate them all;—binding kings in chains, and your nobles in links of iron.—

That we may never again feel the effects of such language and principles,—may God of his mercy grant us. Amen.

SERMON V.

Thirtieth of January.

SERMON V.

EZRA ix. 6, 7.

And I ſaid, O my God, I am aſhamed and bluſh to lift up my face to thee, my God:—for our iniquities are increaſed over our head, and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heavens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great treſpaſs unto this day.—

THERE is not, I believe, throughout all hiſtory, an inſtance of ſo ſtrange and obſtinately corrupt a people, as the Jews, of whom Ezra complains;—for though, on one

hand,—there never was a people that received ſo many teſtimonies of God's favour to encourage them to be good,—ſo, on the other hand, there never was a people which ſo often felt the ſcourge of their iniquities to diſhearten them from doing evil.—

And yet neither the one or the other ſeem'd ever able to make them either the wiſer or better;—neither God's bleſſings, nor his corrections could ever ſoften them;—they ſtill continued a thankleſs, unthinking people,—who profited by no leſſons, neither were to be won with mercies, nor terrified with puniſhments,—but on every ſucceeding trials and occaſions,

ſions, extremely diſpoſed againſt God, to go aſtray and act wickedly.

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with ſorrow, upon his reflection of this unworthy part of their character;—and the manner of his application to God, is ſo expreſſive of his humble ſenſe of it,—and there is ſomething in the words ſo full of tenderneſs and ſhame for them upon that ſcore,—as beſpeaks the moſt paternal, as well as paſtoral concern for them.—And he ſaid,—O my God, I am aſhamed,—and bluſh to lift up my face to thee, my God.—No doubt, the holy man was confounded to look back upon that long ſeries of ſo many of God's undeſerved

undeſerved mercies to them, of which they had made ſo bad and ungrateful a uſe:—he conſidered, that they had all the motives that could lay reſtraints either upon a conſiderate or a reaſonable people;—that God had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the reſt of their fellow creatures,—but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the houſe of bondage, in the moſt hopeleſs condition,—he had heard their cry and took compaſſion upon their afflictions, and by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had ſet them free from the yoke of oppreſſion.—The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the ſame time, that beſides this inſtance

ſtance of God's goodneſs in firſt favouring their miraculous eſcape,—a ſeries of ſucceſſes not to be accounted for from ſecond cauſes, and the natural courſe of events, had crowned their heads in ſo remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of God's general concern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people:—in the wilderneſs he led them like ſheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he ſuffered no man to do them wrong,—but reproved even kings for their ſake;—that when they entered into the promiſed land, no force was able to ſtand before them;—when in poſſeſſion,—no army was ever able to drive

drive them out;—that nations greater and mightier than they, were thruſt forth from before them;—that, in a word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of God, to ſerve them, and that even the ſun itſelf had ſtood ſtill in the midſt of heaven, to ſecure their victories;—that when all theſe mercies were caſt away upon them,—and no principle of gratitude or intereſt could make them an obedient people,—God had tried by misfortunes to bring them back;—that when inſtructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets and holy guides had no effect,—he at laſt ſuffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall again into the ſame ſtate of bondage

dage in Babylon, from whence he had firſt raiſed them.—Here it is that Ezra pours out his confeſſion.—It was no ſmall aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this laſt trial had no good effect upon their conduct;—that all the alternatives of promiſes and threats, comforts and afflictions, inſtead of making them grow the better,—made them apparently grow the worſe:—how could he intercede for them, but with ſhame and ſorrow;—and ſay, as in the text,—O my God, I am aſhamed and bluſh to lift up my face to thee,—for our iniquities are increaſed over our heads,—and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heavens;—ſince the days

days of our fathers have we been in a great treſpaſs unto this day.—

Thus much for the prophet's humble confeſſion to God for the Jews, for which he had but too juſt a foundation given by them;—and I know not how I can make a better uſe of the words, as the occaſion of the day led me to the choice of them,—than by a ſerious application of the ſame ſad confeſſion, in regard to ourſelves.—

Our fathers, like thoſe of the Jews in Ezra's time,—no doubt have done amiſs, and greatly provoked God by their violence;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increaſed over

our

our heads;—if ſince the days of our fathers we have been in great treſpaſs ourſelves unto this day,—'tis fit this day we ſhould be put in mind of it;—nor can the time and occaſion be better employ'd, than in hearing with patience the reproofs which ſuch a parallel will lead me to give.—

It muſt be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever ſo many extraordinary reaſons and ſupernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous as the Jews had;—yet, at the ſame time, there is no one which has not ſufficient (and ſetting aſide at preſent the conſideration of a future ſtate as a reward for being ſo)—there is no nation under heaven, which, beſides the daily

daily bleſſings of God's providence to them, but have received ſufficient bleſſings and mercies at the hands of God to engage their beſt ſervices, and the warmeſt returns of gratitude they can pay:—there has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from ſome grievous calamity,—from the rage of peſtilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the ſword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preſerved by providential diſcoveries, and plots, and deſigns againſt the well-being of their ſtates,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to ſink;—by ſome ſignal interpoſition of God's providence;—they

may

may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts fail'd them.—

If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which at one time or other hath received them all;—insomuch that our history, for this last century, has scarce been any thing else but the history of our deliverances, and God's blessings,—and these in so complicated a chain, and with so little interruption,—as to be scarce ever vouchsafed to any nation or language be-

ſides,—except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the ſtupendous manner of their working,—yet no way ſo in the extenſive goodneſs of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which muſt have wrought them for us.—Here then let us ſtop and look back a moment, and enquire, as in the caſe of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives,—and how far worthy we have lived—of what we have received?—

A ſtranger,—when he heard—that this iſland had been ſo favoured by heaven,—ſo happy in our laws and religion,—ſo flouriſhing in our trade,—ſo bleſſed in our ſituation and natural

tural product,—and in all of them so often,—so visibly protected by providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our blessings;—and he would say,—as we are the most blessed and favoured,—that we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth.

Would to God! there was any other reason to incline one to so charitable a belief;—for without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that we have profited in this respect as little as it was possible for the Jews;—that there is as little virtue,

—and as little ſenſe of religion, at leaſt as little of the appearance of it, as can be ſuppoſed to exiſt at all, in a country where it is countenanced by the ſtate.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were poſſeſſed of,—God, who ſearcheth the heart,—beſt knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at leaſt—the form of godlineſs,—and paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at leaſt the appearance and outward garb of it.—The public ſervice of God was better frequented,—and in a devout, as well as regular manner;—there was no open profaneneſs in our ſtreets to put piety to the bluſh,—or domeſtic ridi-

cule, to make her uneasy, and force her to withdraw.—

Religion, though treated with freedom, was still treated with respect;—the youth of both sexes kept under greater restraint;—good orders and good hours were then kept up in most families; and, in a word, a greater strictness and sobriety of manners maintained throughout amongst people of all ranks and conditions;— so that vice, however secretly it might be practised,—was ashamed to be seen.—

But all this has insensibly been borne down, ever since the days of our forefathers trespass;—when, to avoid

one extreme, we began to run into another;—ſo that inſtead of any great religion amongſt us, you ſee thouſands who are tired even of the form of it, and who have at length thrown the maſk of it aſide,—as an uſeleſs incumbrance.—

But this licentiouſneſs, he would ſay, may be chiefly owing to a long courſe of proſperity, which is apt to corrupt mens minds.—God has ſince this tried you with afflictions;—you have been viſited with a long and expenſive war:—God has ſent, moreover, a peſtilence amongſt your cattle, which has cut off the ſtock from the fold,—and left no herd in the ſtalls.—Surely he'll ſay,—two ſuch terrible

ſcourges

ſcourges muſt have awakened the conſciences of the moſt unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land—from ſuch admonitions,—though they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteouſneſs for themſelves.—

I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope ſhould always be the natural uſe and improvement from ſuch calamities;—for we often find that numbers who, in proſperity, ſeem to forget God, do yet remember him in the day of trouble and diſtreſs.—Yet conſider this nationally,—we ſee no ſuch effect from it in fact, as one would be led to expect from the ſpeculation:—for inſtance,—with

all the devaſtation, bloodſhed, and expence which the war has occaſioned,—how many converts has it made to frugality,—to virtue, or even to ſerioufneſs itſelf?—The peſtilence amongſt our cattle,—though it has diſtreſſed and utterly undone ſo many thouſands, yet what one viſible alteration has it made in the courſe of our lives?—

And though one would imagine that the neceſſary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loſs of rents and property from the other, ſhould in ſome meaſure have withdrawn the means of gratifying our paſſions, as we have done;—yet what appear-

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ance is there amongſt us, that it is ſo?—

What one faſhionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it?—Is not there the ſame luxury and epicuriſm of entertainments at our tables?—do we not purſue with eagerneſs the ſame giddy round of trifling diverſions?—is not the infection diffuſed amongſt people of all ranks, and all ages?—And even grey hairs, whoſe ſober example and manners ought to check the extravagant ſallies of the thoughtleſs, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the ſame coſtly ornaments, and join the general riot. Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even

charity

charity will allow us to ſuppoſe, that a conſciouſneſs of their inability to purſue greater exceſſes, is the only vexation of ſpirit.—In truth, the obſervation falls in with the main intention of the diſcourſe,—which is not framed to flatter your follies,—but plainly to point them out, and ſhew you the general corruption of manners, and want of religion;—which all men ſee,—and which the wiſe and good ſo much lament.—

But the enquirer will naturally go on, and ſay, that though this repreſentation does not anſwer his expectations, that undoubtedly we muſt have profited by theſe leſſons in other reſpects;—that though we have not approved our underſtanding in the

the ſight of God, by a virtuous uſe of our misfortunes, to true wiſdom;—that we muſt have improved them, however, to political wiſdom;—ſo that he would ſay,—though the Engliſh do not appear to be a religious people,—they are at leaſt a loyal one:—They have ſo often felt the ſcourge of rebellion, and have taſted ſo much ſharp fruit from it,—as to have ſet their teeth on edge forever.—But, good God! how would he be aſtoniſhed to find,—that though we have been ſo often toſt to and fro by our own tempeſtuous humours,—that we were not yet ſick of the ſtorm;—that though we ſolemnly, on every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in ſtaining their hands in blood;—

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we never once think of our principles and practices, which tend the ſame way:—and though the providence of God has ſet bounds, that they do not work as much miſchief,—as in days of diſtraction and deſolation,—little reaſon have we to aſcribe the merit thereof to our own wiſdom;—ſo that, when the whole account is ſtated betwixt us,—there ſeems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text;—that our iniquities are increaſed over our heads, and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heaven.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great treſpaſs unto this day;—and though it is fit and becoming that we weep for them,—'tis much more

ſo,

ſo, that we weep for ourſelves,—that we lament our own corruptions,—and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chaſtiſements of God,—or from the ſins and provocations of our forefathers.—

This is the fruit we are to gather, in a day of ſuch humiliation;—and unleſs it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways,—the ſervice of this day is more a ſenſeleſs inſult upon the memories of our anceſtors,—than an honeſt deſign to profit by their miſtakes and miſfortunes,—and to become wiſer and better from our reflections upon them.—

Till

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to God not to lay their ſins to our charge,—whilſt we have ſo many remaining of our own.—Unleſs we are touched for ourſelves, how can we expect he ſhould hear our cry? It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for whatever natural calamities they feel;—this is the very ſtate we are in,—which by diſengaging providence from taking our part,—will always leave a people expoſed to the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however ſtateſmen may diſpute about the cauſes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cauſe,

cauſe, a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to God,—that they are, conſequently, the only true baſis of our happineſs and proſperity on earth.—And however we may ſhelter ourſelves under diſtinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worſt enemy the ſtate has;—and for the contrary, it will always be found, that a virtuous man is the beſt patriot, and the beſt ſubject the king has.—And though an individual may ſay, what will my righteouſneſs profit a nation of men?—I anſwer,—if it fail of a bleſſing here (which is not likely), it will have one advantage,—it will ſave thy own ſoul, and

and give thee that peace at the laſt, which this world cannot take away.—

Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant us all. Amen.

SER-

SERMON VI.

SERMON VI.

ROMANS ii. 4.

Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long ſuffering,— knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?

So ſays St. Paul. And

ECCLESIASTES viii. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.—

TAKE either as you like it, you will get nothing by the bargain.——

'Tis a terrible character of the world, which Solomon is here accounting for,—that their hearts were fully ſet in them to do evil.—And the general outcry againſt the wickedneſs of the age, in every age, from Solomon's down to this, ſhews but too lamentably what grounds have all along been given for the complaint.—

The diſorder and confuſion ariſing in the affairs of the world from the wickedneſs of it, being ever ſuch,—ſo evidently ſeen,—ſo ſeverely felt, as naturally to induce every one who was a ſpectator or a ſufferer, to give the melancholy preference to the times he

he lived in; as if the corruptions of men's manners had not only exceeded the reports of former days, but the power almoſt of riſing above the pitch to which the wickedneſs of the age was arrived.—How far they may have been deceived in ſuch calculations, I ſhall not enquire;—let it ſuffice, that mankind have ever been bad,—conſidering what motives they have had to be better;—and taking this for granted, inſtead of declaiming againſt it, let us ſee whether a diſcourſe may not be as ſerviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and by tracing back the evils to their firſt

principles, to direct ourselves to the true remedy against them.—

Let it here only be premised,—that the wickedness either of the present or past times, whatever scandal and reproach it brings upon christians,—ought not in reason to reflect dishonour upon christianity, which is so apparently well framed to make us good,—that there is not a greater paradox in nature,—than that so good a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.—Though this may seem a paradox,—'tis still, I say, no objection, though it has often been made use of against christianity;—since, if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a de-

a defect in the revelation, but 'tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason, —before revelation was given.—For setting aside the obligations which a divine law lays upon us,—whoever considers the state and condition of human nature, and upon this view, how much stronger the natural motives are to virtue than to vice, would expect to find the world much better than it is, or ever has been.—For who would suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act against the common interest of their own kind, as every man does who yields to the temptation of what is wrong.—But on the other side,—if men first look into the practice of

the world, and there obſerve the ſtrange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it,—one would think they believed that all diſcourſes of virtue and honeſty were mere matter of ſpeculation for men to entertain ſome idle hours with;—and ſay truly, that men ſeemed univerſally to be agreed in nothing but in ſpeaking well and doing ill.—But this caſts no more diſhonour upon reaſon than it does upon revelation;—the truth of the caſe being this,—that no motives have been great enough to reſtrain thoſe from ſin who have ſecretly loved it, and only ſought pretences for the practice of it.—So that if the light of the goſpel has not left a ſufficient

proviſion againſt the wickedneſs of the world,—the true anſwer is, that there can be none.—'Tis ſufficient that the excellency of chriſtianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a ſtrong evidence of its divine original,—and theſe advantages it has above any inſtitution that ever was in the world:—it gives the beſt directions,—the beſt examples,—the greateſt encouragements,—the beſt helps, and the greateſt obligation to gratitude.—But as religion was not to work upon men by way of force and natural neceſſity,—but by moral perſuaſion,—which ſets good and evil before them;—ſo that, if men have power to do evil, or chuſe the good,

and

and will abuſe it, this cannot be avoided.—Not only religion, but even reaſon itſelf, muſt neceſſarily imply a freedom of choice; and all the beings in the world, which have it, were created free to ſtand or free to fall:—and therefore men that will not be wrought upon by this way of addreſs, muſt expect, and be contented, to feel the ſtroke of that rod which is prepared for the back of fools, oft times in this world, but undoubtedly in the next, from the hands of a righteous governor, who will finally render to every man according to his works.—

Becauſe this ſentence is not always executed ſpeedily, is the wiſe man's account of the general licentiouſneſs which

which prevailed through the race of mankind,—ſo early as his days; and we may allow it a place, amongſt the many other fatal cauſes of depravation in our own;—a few of which, I ſhall beg leave to add to this explication of the wiſe man's; ſubjoining a few practical cautions in relation to each, as I go along.—

To begin with Solomon's account in the text,—that becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the hearts of the ſons of men are fully ſet in them to do evil.—

It ſeems ſomewhat hard to underſtand the conſequence, why men ſhould

ſhould grow more deſperately wicked,—becauſe God is merciful and gives them ſpace to repent;—this is no natural effect,—nor does the wiſe man intend to inſinuate that the goodneſs and long ſuffering of God, is the cauſe of the wickedneſs of man, by a direct efficacy to harden ſinners in their courſe.—But the ſcope of his diſcourſe is this, Becauſe a vicious man eſcapes at preſent, he is apt to draw falſe concluſions from it, and from the delay of God's puniſhment in this life, either to conceive them at ſo remote a diſtance, or perhaps ſo uncertain, that though he has ſome doubtful miſgivings of the future, yet he hopes in the main, that his fears are greater

than

than his danger;—and from obſerving ſome of the worſt of men both live and die without any outward teſtimony of God's wrath,—draws from thence ſome flattering ground of encouragement for himſelf, and with the wicked in the pſalm, ſays in his heart, Tuſh, I ſhall never be caſt down, there ſhall no harm happen unto me:—as if it was neceſſary, if God is to puniſh at all, that he muſt do it preſently;—which by the way, would rather ſeem to beſpeak rage and fury of an incenſed party, than the determination of a wiſe and patient judge,—who reſpites puniſhment to another ſtate, declaring for the wiſeſt reaſons, this is not the time for it to take place in,—but

that

that he has appointed a day for it, wherein he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, and make ſuch unalterable diſtinctions betwixt the good and bad,—as to render his future judgment a full vindication of his juſtice.—

That mankind have ever made an ill uſe of this forbearance, is, and I fear will ever be, the caſe:—and St. Peter, in his deſcription of the ſcoffers in the latter days, who, he tells us, ſhall walk after their own luſts, (the worſt of all characters) he gives the ſame ſad ſolution of what ſhould be their unhappy encouragement;—for that they would ſay,—Where is the promiſe [where is the threatening,

ing, or declaration of, ἡ ἐπαγγελία] of his coming,—for ſince the fathers fell aſleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;—that is, the world goes on in the ſame uninterrupted courſe, where all things fall alike to all, without any interpoſition from above,—or any outward token of divine diſpleaſure:—upon this ground, "Come ye," ſay they, as the prophet repreſents them, "I will fetch wine and we will fill ourſelves with ſtrong drink, and to-morrow ſhall be as this day, and much more abundant."

Now if you conſider, you will find, that all this falſe way of reaſoning doth ariſe from that groſs piece of ſelf-

ſelf-flattery, that ſuch do imagine God to be like themſelves,—that is, as cruel and revengeful as they are,—and they preſently think, if a fellow creature offended them at the rate that ſinners are ſaid to offend God, and they had as much power in their hands to puniſh and torture them as he has, they would be ſure to execute it ſpeedily;—but becauſe they ſee God does it not, therefore they conclude, that all the talk of God's anger againſt vice, and his future puniſhment of it,—is mere talk, calculated for the terror of old women and children.—Thus ſpeak they peace to their ſouls, when there is no peace;—for though a ſinner (which the wiſe man adds by way of

of caution after the text) for though a ſinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged upon the earth,—yet ſure I know, that it ſhall be well with them that fear God,—but ſhall not be well with the wicked.—Upon which argument, the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking in the name of God,—uſes this remonſtrance to one under this fatal miſtake which has miſled thouſands;—theſe things thou didſt, and I kept ſilence:—And it ſeems this ſilence was interpreted into conſent;—for it follows,—and thou thoughteſt I was altogether ſuch a one as thyſelf;—but the pſalmiſt adds, how ill he took this at men's hands, and that they ſhould not know the difference between the forbear-

ance of ſinners,—and his neglect of their ſins;—but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thee.—Upon the whole of which, he bids them be better adviſed, and conſider, leſt, while they forget God, he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them.—

Thus much for the firſt ground and cauſe which the text gives, why the hearts of the ſons of men are ſo fully ſet in them to do evil;—upon which I have only one or two cautions to add—That, in the firſt place, we frequently deceive ourſelves in the calculation that ſentence ſhall not be ſpeedily executed.—By ſad experience, vicious and debauched

men

men find this matter to turn out very different in practice, from their expectations in theory; God having so contrived the nature of things throughout the whole system of moral duties,—that every vice, in some measure, should immediately revenge itself upon the doer;—that falsehood, and unfair dealing, ends in distrust and dishonour;—that drunkenness and debauchery, should weaken the thread of life, and cut it so short, that the transgressor shall not live out half his days;—that pride should be followed by mortifications;—extravagance by poverty and distress;—that the revengeful and malicious, should be the greatest tormentor of himself,—the perpetual disturbance

of his own mind, being ſo immediate a chaſtiſement, as to verify what the wiſe man ſays upon it,—That as the merciful man does good to his own ſoul, ſo he that is cruel troubleth his own fleſh.—

In all which caſes there is a puniſhment independent of theſe, and that is, the puniſhment which a man's own mind takes upon itſelf, from the remorſe of doing what is wrong.—Prima eſt hæc ultio,—this is the firſt revenge which (whatever other puniſhments he may eſcape) is ſure to follow cloſe upon his heels, and haunts him whereſoever he goes;—for whenever a man commits a wilful bad action,—he drinks down poiſon,

which,

which, though it may work ſlowly, will work ſurely, and give him perpetual pains and heart-aches,—and, if no means be uſed to expel it, will deſtroy him at laſt.—So that, notwithſtanding that final ſentence of God is not executed ſpeedily in exact weight and meaſure,—there is nevertheleſs a ſentence executed, which a man's own conſcience pronounces againſt him;—and every wicked man, I believe, feels as regular a proceſs within his own breaſt commenced againſt himſelf, and finds himſelf as much accuſed, and as evidently and impartially condemned for what he has done amiſs, as if he had received ſentence before the moſt awful tribunal;—which judgment of conſci-

ence, as it can be looked upon in no other light but as an anticipation of that righteous and unalterable ſentence which will be pronounced hereafter by that Being to whom he is finally to give an account of his actions—I cannot conceive the ſtate of his mind under any character than of that anxious doubtfulneſs deſcribed by the prophet,—That the wicked are like the troubled ſea when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and filth.

A ſecond caution againſt this uniform ground of falſe hope, in ſentence not being executed ſpeedily, will ariſe from this conſideration,—That in our vain calculation of this diſtant

diſtant point of retribution, we generally reſpite it to the day of judgment;—and as that may be a thouſand, or ten thouſand years off, it proportionably leſſens the terror.—To rectify this miſtake, we ſhould firſt conſider, that the diſtance of a thing no way alters the nature of it.—2dly, That we are deceived in this diſtant proſpect, not conſidering that however far off we may fix it in this belief, that in fact it is no farther off from every man than the day of his own death.—And how certain that day is, we need not ſurely be reminded:—'Tis the certainty of the matter, and of an event which will as ſurely come to paſs, as that the ſun ſhall riſe to-morrow morning,—that

ſhould

ſhould enter as much into our calculations, as if it was hanging over our heads.—For though, in our fond imaginations, we dream of living many years upon the earth;—how unexpectedly are we ſummoned from it?—How oft, in the ſtrength of our age, in the midſt of our projects,—when we are promiſing ourſelves the eaſe of many years?—how oft, at that very time, and in the height of this imagination, is the decree ſealed, and the commandment gone forth to call us into another world?—

This may ſuffice for the examination of this one great cauſe of the corruption of the world;—from whence I ſhould proceed, as I purpoſed, to an enquiry after ſome other unhappy

unhappy cauſes which have a ſhare in this evil.—But I have taken up ſo much more of your time in this than I firſt intended,—that I ſhall defer what I have to ſay to the next occaſion, and put an end to this diſcourſe, by an anſwer to a queſtion often aſked relatively to this argument, in prejudice of chriſtianity, which cannot be more ſeaſonably anſwered than in a diſcourſe at this time;—and that is, —Whether the chriſtian religion has done the world any ſervice in reforming the lives and morals of mankind, —which ſome who pretend to have conſidered the preſent ſtate of vice, ſeem to doubt of?—This objection I, in ſome meaſure, have anticipated in the beginning of this diſcourſe;—and what I have to add to that argument

ment is this,—that as it is impoſſible to decide the point by evidence of facts, which at ſo great a diſtance cannot be brought together and compared,—it muſt be decided by reaſon, and the probability of things; upon which iſſue, one might appeal to the moſt profeſſed deiſt, and truſt him to determine,—whether the lives of thoſe who are ſet looſe from all obligations, but thoſe of conveniency,—can be compared with thoſe who have been bleſt with the extraordinary light of a religion?—and whether ſo juſt and holy a religion as the chriſtian, which ſets reſtraints even upon our thoughts,—a religion which gives us the moſt engaging ideas of the perfections of God,—at the ſame time that it impreſſes the moſt awful ones

of

of his majesty and power;—a Being rich in mercies, but if they are abused, terrible in his judgments;—one constantly about our secret paths,—about our beds;—who spieth out all our ways,—noticeth all our actions, and is so pure in his nature, that he will punish even the wicked imaginations of the heart, and has appointed a day wherein he will enter into this enquiry, and execute judgment according as we have deserved.—

If either the hopes or fears, the passions or reason of men are to be wrought upon at all, such principles must have an effect, though, I own, very far short of what a thinking man should expect from such motives.—

No

No doubt, there is great room for amendment in the chriſtian world,—and the profeſſors of our holy religion may in general be ſaid to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men,—conſidering what reaſons and obligations they have to be better.—Yet ſtill I affirm, if thoſe reſtraints were leſſened,—the world would be infinitely worſe;—and therefore we cannot ſufficiently bleſs and adore the goodneſs of God, for theſe advantages brought by the coming of Chriſt,—which God grant that we may live to be more deſerving of;—that, in the laſt day, when he ſhall come again to judge the world, we may riſe to life immortal. Amen.

END OF VOL. V.

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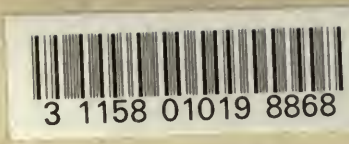
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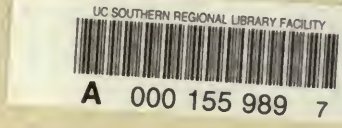
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